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Yehoshua Thon's *Luah Ahi'asaf*: an Editor and a Journal

The press in general, and literary periodicals in particular, are an inseparable part of research upon Hebrew literature. Very appropriate here are Nurit Govrin's words that "as a matter of fact, the history of Hebrew literature is a history of literary periodicals, and its course was determined by one periodical to another".¹ Thus, together with *Ha-Shiloah*, *Luah Ahi'asaf* ("Ahi'asaf Calendar/Almanac") was one of the most important and mightiest Hebrew literary periodicals at the turn of the 20th century.² The annual was published by the *Ahi'asaf* publishing house – considered the first modern Hebrew publishing house, "the first to solicit, publish and distribute works of individual authors."³ *Luah Ahi'asaf* was described in its subheading as a "literary and practical calendar for the nation" (*luah am*), and its character was to be different from the elitist one of *Ha-Shiloah*. One of the main impulses to establish *Luah Ahi'asaf* was, according to the manifesto from its first issue – the lack of calendars providing Hebrew readers with pleasure of reading literature as well as knowledge and news on the international situation. As the manifesto stated, *Luah Ahi'asaf* was to be "a source of pleasure and utility."⁴ The annual therefore contained a practical part – a Hebrew calendar for the upcoming year and advertisements – along with a literary section including literature, historical and sociological articles, discussions on current affairs,

¹ Nurit Govrin, "Manifestim sifrutim" ("Literary manifestos"), in *Kriyat ha-dorot* (Tel Aviv: Gvanim, 2002), vol. 2, 12.

² On *Ahi'asaf* see Menucha Gilboa, *Leksikon ha-itonut ha-ivrit be meot ha-18 ve-ha-19* ("Hebrew Periodicals in the 18th and 19th Centuries") (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1992), 374–378.

³ Edited by Ahi'asaf Publishing House, founded in 1891 in Warsaw by Bnei Moshe (Ben Avigdor, Eliezer Kaplan, Matityahu Cohen, Zeev Gluskin) – secret society within the Hibat Zion movement devoted to the national-cultural revival ideals of Ahad Ha-Am (YIVO, Kenneth Moss).

⁴ Editorial entitled "El ha-kor'im" ("To the readers"), *Luah Ahi'asaf* 1 (1893): 6.

reviews and biographies (called “tmunot” – “pictures”). Yet another distinctive feature of the annual was its attitude to capital. This was not characteristic of *Luah Ahiʿasaf* in particular, but of the politics of the *Ahiʿasaf* publishing house in general. In keeping with Ben Avigdor’s views, *Ahiʿasaf* had two aims. The main one was to extend the boundaries of Hebrew literature in all its professions.⁵ The second aim, no less important, was to provide writers with suitable conditions for their work, meaning setting an economic framework based on salary for the writers so they could focus on writing instead of being occupied with editing and distribution of their books.⁶

Luah Ahiʿasaf was known as an open and pluralistic platform. One of its characteristics was an alternating editorial board. Through the years, the annual was edited by various editors beginning with Ben-Avigdor (Avraham Leib Shalkovic), through Moshe Leib Lilienblum, Reuven Brainin, Yoseph Klausner, to David Frischmann. As mentioned by Avner Holtzman, “each editor left his personal imprint upon the volume.”⁷ While Ben Avigdor emphasised the importance of the practical and national character of the periodical, Frischmann pointed to the priority of literature, Lilienblum, in a positivist manner, disassociated *Luah Ahiʿasaf* from personal lyrics, Brainin, who perceived *Ahiʿasaf* as a platform for flourishing new talents, supported beginning writers, and Klausner presented a political-Zionist tendency.⁸ As for the historical and cultural reality of European Jewry at the beginning of the 20th century facing the influences of Haskala, political Zionism, Ahad HaʿAm’s and Berdyczewski’s dispute on literature as well as discussions on usage of the Hebrew language, *Luah Ahiʿasaf*’s stance was “going in the middle.” This attitude was expressed in the introduction to the ninth volume (1902) and was consistently realised by the editors of the journal.⁹

The editorial staff encouraged writers from different generations to take part in *Luah Ahiʿasaf*, therefore the spectrum of writers who published there was wide and included some maskilic authors (Moshe Leib Lilienblum, Mordekhai David Brandstetter) along with writers from “ha-mahalach he-chadash” (The New Movement) (Ben Avigdor, Reuven Brainin, Ezra Goldin) and

⁵ Not only belles-lettres but also scientific and philosophical literature.

⁶ See Shulamit Shelhav, *Me-kavanot le-maasim: perek rishon be-toldot ha-molot ha-ivrit ha-hilonit ha-modernit*, unpublished MA thesis written under the supervision of Nurit Govrin (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1992), 61–66; Hagit Cohen, “Politika shel tarbut leumit: hocaʿat Ahiʿasaf 1891–1902” (“The Politics of National Culture: Ahiʿasaf Publishing House 1891–1902”), in *Be-hanuto shel moher ha-sfarim* (“At the Bookseller’s Shop”) (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2006), 74–75.

⁷ YIVO, Avner Holtzman, *Luah Ahiʿasaf*.

⁸ Political issues, reports from Zionist Congress and stories about travels to Eretz Israel. Gilboa, 377.

⁹ Ibid., 376.

the younger generation. Consequently, works of the most prominent Hebrew writers of the time were published in *Ahi'asaf*, among them representatives of the older generation such as Mendele Mocher Sforim, Ycchok Leybush Perec, D. Frischmann and Yeshaiahu Bershadski, along with younger writers like Haim Nachman Bialik, Shaul Czernichowski, Mordechai Zeev Faierberg, Ya'acov Kahan, Ya'acov Fichman, Zalman Shneor, Ycchak Kacnelson, David Shimonovic, Yaakov Steinberg, and last but not least Yosef Haim Brenner. The most fertile authors of scientific articles and essays were Lilienblum, Ahad Ha-Am, Shimon Bernfeld, Simcha Ben-Tsion, and "the youngsters" like Micha Yosef Berdyczewski, Yoseph Klausner, Yehoshua Thon and Hillel Zeitlin.

Luah Ahi'asaf was published yearly from 1893 till 1904 – the time when Hebrew literary and cultural activity in Warsaw was at its height. At the turn of the 20th century, Warsaw was not only the biggest Hebrew publishing house in Europe, as Dan Miron put it,¹⁰ but also a vivid centre of the young generation of Hebrew writers.¹¹ Hence, the first 12 volumes of *Luah Ahi'asaf* can be perceived as "a testament to the vitality of Hebrew literary life in Warsaw," as they were called by Avner Holtzman.¹²

The break in editing the annual was caused by financial reasons – writers had refused to publish on account of unsatisfactory fees. In 1923, after a gap of almost 20 years, Dr Yehoshua Thon endeavoured to bring the annual back to life, and found that not only the reality but also the editorial conditions in Poland had changed. After numerous immigrations to *Eretz-Israel*, waves of emigration to America, and World War I, the Hebrew literary centre was transferred to *yishuv* (the Jewish community in Palestine) and Eastern European centres like Odessa and Warsaw lost their prominence for good. During the interwar period, Hebrew periodicals and literature were still published in Poland; however, there was no editor who did not face a struggle with financial

¹⁰ On Hebrew Press and Publishing in Eastern Europe (and Warsaw especially) at the turn of the 20th century see Dan Miron, *Bodedim be-moadam* ("When Loners Come Together") (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1987), 28–36, 370–373.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 365–381.

¹² Holtzman, YIVO. Avraham Levinson provides us with interesting numbers regarding the popularity of the annual. Maintaining that the first eight years of *Ahi'asaf* publishing activities were "golden years" of prosperity, he gives the numbers of the *Luah Ahi'asaf* circulation. According to these, the first issue of the annual was printed in 3,000 copies, 2,500 of which were sold within one year of the publication. Some issues were also reissued. Avraham Levinson, "Varhsa – merkaz ha-tarbut ha-ivrit ve-ha-yehudit" ("Warsaw – the Centre of Hebrew and Jewish Culture"), in *Toldot yehudey Warsha* ("The History of Warsaw's Jewry") (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1952), 307.

problems and lack of readership.¹³ The reasons for this situation were not just external (transfer to yishuv, World War I), but also internal, closely connected to Polish reality. The discussions on the worsening situation of the Hebrew literary “industry” in Poland ongoing in the Hebrew press pointed to insufficient devotion to the Hebrew language among the young generation. The preference of the party and Zionist press imported from *Eretz-Israel* over local periodicals, competing languages – Yiddish and Polish – along with the process of acculturation and Polonisation had an influence on the decline of the Hebrew centre.¹⁴ Nonetheless, as an editor of a Hebrew journal, Yehoshua Thon indicated another difficulty with which Hebrew editors apparently struggled.

The manifesto opening the 13th and last volume of *Luah Ahi’asaf* may serve as a scrutiny of the epoch. Its main topic oscillates around “economics of literature;” however, this relates not to Polish economics directly, but to the European problem of inflation. Thon, who had himself published a few articles in former volumes of the annual,¹⁵ pointed out the close relations between literature and economy and sternly criticised Hebrew writers who did not respond to the editorial staff request to take part in the new volume of *Luah Ahi’asaf*. “Mighty master dollar rules over our literature, our mighty writers

¹³ On Hebrew cultural and literary activities in interwar Poland see Shmuel Werses’ articles on Hebrew literary periodicals and their readership in interwar Poland: Shmuel Werses, “Kitwej-et ivriim le-sifrut be-polin beyn shtey milhemot ha-olam” (“Hebrew Literary Journals in Interwar Poland”), in *Beyn shtey milhemot ha-olam: prakim be-hayey ha-tarbut shel yehudey polin le-leshonoteyhem* (“Between Two World Wars: On the Cultural Life of the Jews in Poland in Its Three Languages”), eds. Chone Shmeruk and Shmuel Werses (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997), 96–127; idem, “The Hebrew Press and Its Readership in Interwar Poland”, in *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars* (Hanover–London: University Press of New England, 1989), 312–333. About writers, poets and the conditions they lived in in interwar Poland see David Weinfeld’s essays included in the anthology of Hebrew poetry in interwar Poland which he edited: David Weinfeld, *Ha-shira ha-ivrit be-polin beyn shtey milhemot ha-olam* (“Hebrew Poetry in Poland between the Two World Wars”) (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1997), 19–109.

¹⁴ On this matter see Chone Shmeruk, “Hebrew-Yiddish-Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture,” in *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, 285–311; Natan Cohen, “Ha-sviva ha-sifrutit ha-ivrit be-polin (1920–1939) u-kshareya im ha-mimsad ha-sifrutit u-necigav be-erec Israel” (“The Hebrew Literary Environment in Poland (1920–1939) and Connections to the Literary Establishment and Its Representatives in Eretz-Israel”), *Tarbit* 67 (1998): 379–395; and Magda Sara Szwabowicz, “Polski Żyd piszący po hebrajsku” (“The Polish Jew who writes in Hebrew. The problem of identity in interwar Poland”), in *Żydowski Polak, Polski Żyd: problem tożsamości w literaturze polsko-żydowskiej* (“Polish Jew, Jewish Pole: the Problem of Identity in Polish-Jewish Literature”), eds. Anna Molisak and Zuzanna Kołodziejska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Elipsa, 2011), 45–51.

¹⁵ Vol. 7 (“Ha-sociologia shel Ahad Ha-Am” – “Ahad Ha-Am’s Sociology”), vol. 10 (“Mahut ha-yahadut” – “The Essence of Judaism”), vol. 11 (“Mishma’at be-miflaga” Discipline in the party), vol. 12 (“Lekhatchila u-be-di’avad” Originally and retrospectively). All of these were collected in the volume of his writings published in 1926 – Dr Yehoshua Thon, *Ktavim* (“Writings”) (Warsaw: Ahi’asaf, 1922).

need only him and as natural born aristocrats they are fed up with small money, money of the labourer.”¹⁶

According to the manifesto, most of the writers ignored the requests and did not bother to reply, some of them asked for gratification and others simply specified “their price:” “We, the poor ones simply kneeled before those enormous amount of money which we had never seen or ever dreamt of. And some of the writers did not answer at all, as lords ignore the poor.”¹⁷

Yet, remembering the two main goals of the *Ahi'asaf* Publishing House, this situation may have been caused by the writers' habit of being paid well by Ben Avigdor and his successors.

To Thon however, the importance of the restitution of *Luah Ahi'asaf* did not consist in simple continuation of great tradition. The historical significance and tradition of the annual was to Thon not only “sanctity” but the cultural assets of Jews. Despite all the difficulties, the 13th volume of the annual was published and the editorial staff did not lose hope: “Renewal of *Luah* was for us a kind of symbol, good news that after a long time of sleep ... we are finally awakened.” After the pogroms and post-war silence, Thon felt an obligation for the Polish Jewry as a huge community to “show to the entire world sign of life and revival.”¹⁸

Nevertheless, the “great tradition” of *Luah Ahi'asaf* could not really be held without achieving its original objectives. It was not only that *Ahi'asaf* could not supply its authors with proper reward, but it also failed at “extending the boundaries of literature” and presenting the highest-quality works. The lack of contribution of prominent writers was acutely felt in the last volume of the annual. The original priority of literature could not be maintained. The only well-known writers who contributed their works were the poet Ya'acov Kahan and the writer Eliezer Steinmann.¹⁹ Besides their works, two articles were published on Hebrew poetry – one by Orinowski, examining the poetry of Ya'acov Kahan, and the other Mordechai Ehrenpreis's “sketches on the history of Hebrew poetry from Deborah to Bialik.” As Shmuel Werses concluded, the “literary section was poor and colourless.”²⁰ However, the editor was fairly well aware of this fact, as we read in the editorial: “We know

¹⁶ “Ha-sifrut ve-sha'ar ha-ksafim...” (“Literature and the Exchange Rate”), signed Ha-Ma'arechet (“editorial board”), pages unnumbered; *Luah Ahi'asaf* 13 (1923).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Similar sayings on the Polish/Diasporic Jewry left in the Diaspora yet willing to create and stay active can be found in almost every Hebrew periodical printed at that time in Poland. I shall elaborate on this matter later on.

¹⁹ In *Kedoshim* (“Saints”) – fragments of prose by Steinmann like in the short story by B. Epelbaum, *Be-chol nafsheha* (“With All Your Soul”) echoed the bloodshed and anti-Semitic events in Ukraine.

²⁰ Werses, *Kitvey-et ivriim*, 99.

the greatest names in our literature are missing here [in *Luah Ahi'asaf*]. And without a doubt along with great names also valuable things are missing ... Yet we chose [to publish this] which is in our opinion worthy, useful and pleasant. We did our best to present the most urgent, complicated and gratifying matters of our world.”²¹ Thus, the section of historical and scientific articles was richer than the literary one. Apart from historical articles by Ya'acov Naftali Shimhoni (“Galut Bavel” – “Babylonian Exile”), Shmuel Leib Tzitrion (on Peretz ben Moshe Smolenskin), E.N. Frenk (“Gdoley am polin u-mdinat ha-jehudim” – “The Eminences of the Polish Nation and the Jewish State”), a large part of *Luah Ahi'asaf* was indeed dedicated to current political-historical matters. Thus Yoseph Klausner published here his report on the condition and progress of settlement in Palestine (called “Palestina-Eretz Israel”), Icchak Grunbaum wrote about “national” Jewish councils being formed in every country of the Diaspora, and Shalom Rozenfeld (“Hashkafa Yehudit 1914–1922” – “Jewish View 1914–1922”) on the situation of European Jewry in the 20th century, while his focus was on anti-Semitic incidents, the First World War and the role of Zionism. A separate section – “Historical documents” – included documents connected mostly with the Zionist movement and Eretz-Israel.²² One of the significant publications was Menahem Mendel Probst’s article on the chronological development of the Hebrew press.

Similarly to the opening manifesto of *Luah Ahi'asaf* the 13th, Thon’s article which appeared in the volume (“Al miftan shel tkufa” – “On the Threshold of an Epoch”) examined modern times from the angle of the socio-cultural changes which followed political and economic alterations. He criticised the materialism of the modern age and its shallow culture where objects and money came to be a value. Thon wrote:

The world has no style today – it’s ruled by fashion. There is no creativity today – the world is ruled by technique. And that proves better than a hundred witnesses of a horrifying decline, blankness of heart and depravity.²³

A new hero of the epoch – a powerless decadent looking for applause – was to be a representative of moral decline. The “lustful weakness” which replaced prior values became the essence of modern art and a model to the new generation. Both art and literature became in Thon’s opinion fragmentary, unable to represent the completeness of life. The short story – a new

²¹ “Ha-sifrut ve-shaar ha-ksafim.”

²² The section called “Teudot historiyyot” (“Historical Documents”) consisted of 60 pages with documents such as: official letters of Histadrut to the British Government, extracts from agreements on the British mandate on Palestine (from 1920) and decisions of the American Congress (1922) confirming official help in “creating a national centre” for Jews in Palestine.

²³ “Al miftan shel ha-tkufa” (“On the Threshold of an Epoch”), *Luah Ahi'asaf* 13 (1923): 13.

popular literary form – served him as an example of the failure of presentation of “full existence.”²⁴ In his other text (“Generation Comes, Generation Goes”), he postulated that the literature of the new generation should “listen and observe” to real life, be its reflection and thus the expression of its spirit.²⁵ In his article “National Literature,” he elaborated his views on Hebrew literature, showing that contemporary literature which is far away from being a representation of real life provides the nation only with a small part of its spiritual needs.²⁶ He not only accused Hebrew literature of ignoring the urgent questions European Jewry was struggling with, but also condemned its aesthetic significance.²⁷ The cure for this deterioration was to be “national literature,” providing the nation of Israel with all its needs.

Scrutinising the condition of the European Jewry in “On the threshold of an epoch,” Thon argued that the Jewish nation is a dreadful case of unsteady people – a “human swing,” as he called it. The following sentence recurs here as a kind of refrain: “The morals of the Jewish nation are contaminated and the spirit of Israel is floating and fluttering in the air without a foothold.” Maintaining that “books” were the core of Jewish culture for centuries, Thon argued that there were no new books yet to serve as a foundation for new culture. And even though there were some new important publications (like *More Nevohey Ha-Zman* [“Guide for the Perplexed of the Time”] by Rabbi Nahman Krochmal, the writings of Ahad Ha’Am or the poetry of Haim Nahman Bialik), the nation itself did not acquire them sufficiently. Lack of readers was one of the factors that hindered creation of a new “full” culture.

²⁴ Similarly, however much earlier, the fragmentation of Hebrew literature had been criticised by Ahad Ha-Am, who called it “torn pieces” (*krayim*). To his essay published on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of *Luah Ahi'asaf* (1903), Yosef Haim Brenner responded, arguing that the “broken” form of expression of the young generation is the only possible expression and response for the reality in which they live, which is itself “broken.” See Ahad Ha-Am, “Ahar eser shanim” (“Ten Years Later”), *Luah Ahi'asaf* 10 (1903): 49–55; Yosef Haim Brenner, *Ktavim* (“Writings”) (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibuc Ha-Meuhad, 1985), vol. 3, 270–271 (first published in *Revivim* 2, 1908). See also Shachar M. Pinsker, *Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 15–16.

²⁵ Brenner, *Ktavim*, 41–44.

²⁶ The article was a polemic with Ahad Ha-Am, and one of Thon's most important demands was for the literature to be Jewish-European or even Hebrew-European. Yehoshua Ozjasz Thon, “Sifrut leumit” (“National Literature”), in *Ktavim*, 11–17 (published for the first time in *Ha-Shiloah* 4).

²⁷ Similar terms and arguments were used some time later by Malkiel Lusternik, a young poet and one of the most active Hebrew editors and publicists in interwar Poland. He believed that literature should reflect actual reality and be engaged in actual matters (as was his poetry). For him, Hebrew literature “should have a clear historical orientation, be eager for full national life” and express an independent national and cultural existence. Malkiel Lusternik (signed as M. Merimi), “Al ha-shira ha-ivrit ha-hadasha” (“New Hebrew Poetry”), *Reshit* 3–4 (1933): 15–17.

The other was, as Thon wrote – “waste of our limited powers” by writing in a couple of languages which do not belong to their culture.²⁸

In the past the people of Israel used to know that the only real and deep culture is the Hebrew one. And despite the fact that for every-day life needs we were using foreign languages ... they are not a language of our culture. ... Nowadays we theoretically create in two languages, and the poor nation is left with nothing, torn in two different directions.²⁹

Taking into consideration the other Hebrew periodicals published in Poland in the interwar period, it has to be said that Thon's reasoning was not exceptional. Yet it can be considered as “a voice of the time,” as all the matters mentioned here were constantly brought up in the Hebrew press.

As a representative of Hebrew writers in Poland, Tzvi Zevulun Weinberg emphatically expressed his fear and worry about the state of Hebrew culture in Poland. During the speech he gave as chairman of the Association of Hebrew Writers and Journalists at the congress of *Tarbut* on 28th September 1931, like Thon he noted the change in priorities as characteristic of the young generation “forgetting about its soul and neglecting spiritual values.”³⁰ However, it was not only the younger generation that was to blame, but the older one too. Being a teacher himself, Weinberg emphasised the deterioration of Hebrew education, pointing to teachers, who, in his opinion, were insufficiently devoted to popularisation of Hebrew literature and press among their students. The same arguments against insufficient devotion of both educators and students were used in the editorial of the ninth issue of *Zramim* (“Currents;”

²⁸ Thon, *On the Threshold of an Epoch*, 19. His words are somewhat confounding if we take into consideration the fact that Thon himself wrote in many languages.

²⁹ Ibid. Interestingly, Thon not only focuses on the use of “foreign” languages by the people of Israel but apparently criticises writing in two languages – Hebrew and Yiddish, that is. In another literary periodical printed in Warsaw 10 years earlier, Micha Josef Berdyczewski wrote on “blurring the borders” between Jewish languages (Yiddish and Hebrew) and even more – on the destructive impact they have one on another. See Micha Josef Berdyczewski, “Tishtush ha-gvulim” (“Blurring the Borders”), *Netivot* (1913): 330–332.

³⁰ Tzvi Zevulun Weinberg, “Kolo shel ha-sofer ha-ivri” (“The Stand of the Hebrew Writer”), first published in *Zramim* 1 (1931): 15, later on included in *Adam be-ohalo* (“Man in His Tent”) (Tel Aviv–Jerusalem: Neuman, 1955), 93–95. Similarly, Fishel Lahover in *Alim*: “The situation of Hebrew literature is clear – there are dangers on every platform. Writers are gone, readers are gone. Books are neither published nor bought. And the worst thing about that is that even a young generation who could supposedly be attracted by literature is gone,” Fishel Lahover, “Al ha-macaw” (“The situation”), *Alim* 3 (1927). See also Yacov Fichman, “Likrat atido shel ha-sefer ha-ivri; ha-noar ve-ha-sefer ha-ivri” (“For the Future of the Hebrew Book: Youth and the Hebrew Book”), *Alim* 1 (1925): 9–24; Baruch Fabri, “Hurban sifrut” (“Destruction of Literature”), *Reshit* 3–4 (1933): 14–15.

1931–1932) – a Hebrew literary journal printed in Vilnius.³¹ Reading in Polish and Yiddish, was for the editors of *Zramim* an obvious cause of decline of the Hebrew press as well as of the doubted commitment of Zionists. As stated by editorial staff, the commitment to the Hebrew movement of the majority of Zionists was only theoretical – they had money to spend on theatres and travels to congresses, but not to buy a Hebrew newspaper.³²

As for literature, similar ideas to Thon's could be found in Malkiel Lusternik's articles. His views on literature and its function were published regularly in *Reshit* ("The Beginning"; 1932–1934), the Hebrew literary periodical he edited together with Tzvi Zevulun Weinberg and Ber Pomerantz in Warsaw. In 1933, ten years after the publication of the last volume of *Luah Ahi'asaf*, Lusternik joined Thon in condemning literature which was "uprooted" from reality, trying to encourage writers to be more involved in the cultural and social life of the nation. As a member of Gordonia and advocate of political Zionism, he gave emphasis to the didactic role of literature. He called for "engaged literature" (*sifrut meguyeset*), which should be "a vivid expression of the dynamics and potential of developing society," contain educational values and be distinguished by its historical awareness.³³

Another common topic for Thon's article opening the 13th volume of *Luah Ahi'asaf* and for other journals published in interwar Poland was hope for the survival of Hebrew culture in the Diaspora. After describing the degeneration of the current time, Thon still saw positive sides of work on Hebrew culture in Poland.

³¹ Unsigned editorial, very possibly written by the editor – Israel Klausner, "Al ha-perek: Corech v'yecholet" ("On the Agenda: Need and Ability"), *Zramim* 8 (1932): 3–4.

³² Ibid., 4. In a similar way, the following authors wrote on the unsatisfactory efforts of Zionists to promote Hebrew as a spoken language: Yoseph Klausner, "Shloshet ha-merkazim shel ha-sifrut ha-ivrit ha-hadasha be-polanya" ("Three centres of new Hebrew literature in Poland"), *Moznaim* 3–4, vol. 11 (1980): 222; and David Weinfeld, *Ha-shira ha-ivrit be-polin beyn sthey milhemot ha-olam* ("Hebrew Poetry in Poland between the Two World Wars") (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1997), 20.

³³ "Va-od" ("Furthermore"), *Reshit* 2 (1933): 22–24. See also his article on modern Hebrew poetry; like Thon he condemned the new model of artist detached from reality: M. Merimi, "Al ha-shira ha-ivrit ha-hadasha" ("New Hebrew poetry"), *Reshit* 3–4 (1933): 15–17. On *Reshit* and the discussion about literature between its two editors (Lusternik and Pomerantz), see the unpublished MA dissertation written by Orli Bechar under the supervision of Prof. Avner Holtzman. Orli Bechar, *Ktav ha-et "Reshit", Varsha 1932–1934. Bavua shel merkaz sifrut doeck* ("Reshit' Journal", Warsaw 1932–1934. Silhouette of the fading literary centre) (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1989), 85–90.

There is [in *Luah Ahi'asaf*], an echo of both – past despair but also awakening hopes. And the latter are overcoming. We think that readers will find in the journal an echo of a strong voice of *craving* to work and to create.³⁴

The same year, Eliezer Steinmann, the editor of *Kolot* (Voices; 1923–1924) expressed the need to transform the weakness of the Diaspora into a measure of strength:

Here, in one of the cities of the exile, it is necessary to build a centre of Hebrew culture, an electric power station to distribute light. This centre is the observant eye of the pulsing Hebrew heart, the voice heralding, in all lands, the existence and resurgence of our culture, the unifying telegraph.³⁵

Weinberg too, in his aforementioned speech from 1931, put emphasis on the mission of writers and teachers in preserving Hebrew culture in the Diaspora. Calling upon them not to lose enthusiasm and devotion to their work, he argued that “there is still time and hope to save the Polish Jewry.”³⁶



The history of the Hebrew press in interwar Poland was marked by attempts and failures. Thanks to the small but wilful and determined group of people who wanted to preserve the light of Hebrew literature in the Diaspora, new periodicals had been established despite the hostile environment and variety of difficulties.³⁷ Along with other Hebrew editors like Eliezer Steinmann, Ysvi Zevulun Weinberg, Malkiel Lusternik, Yehuda Warshawiak, Ya'acov Kahan and Ya'acov Netanieli, Yehoshua Thon was one of the distinguished Hebrew activists of that time. His trust in European Jewry was exceptional by all means. In the last paragraph of the manifesto to *Luah Ahi'asaf* 13, he wrote: “This volume shall prove that Eastern [European] Jewry is not dead yet. Quite the opposite – its life is complete now, hands full of work, head full of bright ideas and heart filled with hopes.”³⁸

³⁴ “Ha-sifrut ve-shaar ha ksafim.”

³⁵ Eliezer Steinmann, “Hearot ktanot” (“Tiny Remarks”), *Kolot* 3 (1923): 117.

³⁶ Weinberg, *Kolo shel ha-sofer*, 15.

³⁷ An important article on Hebrew literature and the struggle of writers in interwar Poland was written by Hannan Hever, “From Exile-without-Homeland to Homeland-without-Exile: Hebrew Fiction in Interwar Poland”, in *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon. Nation Building and Minority Discourse* (New York–London: New York University Press, 2002), 67–100.

³⁸ “Ha-sifrut ve-shaar ha-ksafim.”

The impact Thon had on following generations was expressed by the editors of *Sefer Ha-Shana Lyehudey Polania* ("Yearbook for Polish Jewry")³⁹ – one of very last Hebrew periodicals published before the outbreak of World War II. The manifest of the periodical⁴⁰ was followed by a short text commemorating the personality and authority of Dr Yehoshua Thon. Apparently, Thon wished to take part in *Sefer Ha-Shana Lyehudey Polania* by publishing his article which he had already given a name: "Meayin u-lean" ("Whence and Whither?"). It was to be a sociological scrutiny of the epoch. In the meantime, however, as we read in the tribute to Thon, he was gone. "And instead of his paper opening the volume, there is only a reference to him who is no longer with us. Instead of a sociological article – the mourning of grief-stricken people. Great is the loss, vast is the breakage."⁴¹

³⁹ Published in Warsaw 1937 by Bentsiyon Benshalom, Zacharia Zilberpfenig and Tzvi Fefer.

⁴⁰ We read in the manifesto: "this book will prove to all lonely Hebrew people that even in this difficult time Hebrew literature in Poland is still alive, the bond between Hebrew past and future is not yet broken and that there is still continuity and hope"; "Me-et ma'arechet", in *Sefer Ha-Shana Lyehudey Polania* ("Yearbook for Polish Jewry") (1937), 6.

⁴¹ "Yehoshua Thon zichrono li'vracha: be-lo eto niktaf" ("Yehoshua Thon, God Rest His Soul: Untimely Gone"), 7–8.

